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Bioarchaeology of Violence

Debra L. Martin, Ryan P. Harrod, and Ventura R. Pérez (eds.). Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012. 291 pp. ISBN: 9780813041506. \$60.36.

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Sofaer (2006) argues that the main aim of bioarchaeological studies should be an understanding and reconstruction of the varied ways in which bodies are used in social, political, ideological, and economic processes. For some time now, bioarchaeology has gotten away with using little to no guiding theoretical perspectives in its analysis of human skeletal material, while focusing primarily on the advancement of technological methods. This lack of theory has led to the discipline becoming stuck in a normalized routine of description without interpretation and has also led to a loss of contextual information on human behavior. Given that bioarchaeologists contribute to both archaeological and physical anthropological thought and theory, it is imperative to introduce more social theory into interpretations of biological data, such as trauma and violence. In their new edited volume, *Bioarchaeology of Violence*, Debra L. Martin, Ryan P. Harrod, and Ventura R. Pérez identify this lack of social theory and argue that in order for the discipline to expand, theory must be better incorporated into bioarchaeological methods. Violence is a serious topic of concern for many anthropologists working with modern or past peoples. The editors of this volume have illustrated how the multidisciplinary nature of the bioarchaeological approach can incorporate cultural anthropology, archaeology, and physical anthropology to examine complex issues including: small-scale intra/inter-personal violence, structural and systemic violence, and warfare. This edited volume is not an instruction manual of how to identify trauma and violence. Rather, to varying degrees, the contributing authors attempt to incorporate theory into practice. The arguments are refreshing in that they allow for an expansion of current methods beyond simple description.

The editors have organized the contributing chapters into four parts: Methods and Theory, Small-Scale Conflict, Warfare, and Ritualized Violence. *Part I. Method and Theory*, proposes new methods and theories to incorporate into bioarchaeological research on violence. Ventura R. Pérez (Ch 1) of-

fers a cultural model that moves beyond violence as an aberrant act without meaning, and argues that we need to study violence in a way that allows us to move beyond strictly the physical ramifications of violence and also study its psychological, political, economic, and sociocultural ramifications. Pérez's concept of "politicization of the dead," views human remains as a medium that the living can use to manipulate cultural behaviors. Violence in this perspective is seen as a collective practice of a group with meaning long after death. Pérez introduces the concept that there is more to violence than the physical damages observed on human remains, and argues that human remains can be politicized and utilized for aggrandizement. Haagen D. Klaus (Ch 2) uses social theories relating to structural violence (violence that promotes social inequalities such as health, nutrition, and lack of access to resources) to aid in its identification of structural violence and its ramifications by attempting to identify evidence for this seemingly invisible form of violence within hierarchical populations. Ryan P. Harrod, Pierre Liénard, and Debra L. Martin (Ch 3) build off of the work of Walker and Hewlett (1990) and offer an ethnobioarchaeological approach that has the potential to provide insights into the function and motivations of violent social behavior. Harrod, Liénard, and Martin promote the continued development of ethnobioarchaeological methods as a processual means of identifying and testing hypotheses about violence in the past and as a means of gaining better insights into how violence is utilized in the present. Although the theoretical perspectives introduced in Part I are tailored to the study of violence in the past, they provide a critical step for the continued development of a body of bioarchaeological theory and could easily be applied to other bioarchaeological topics.

Beyond Part One, the edited volume is organized by subject matter. The authors utilize various theoretical and methodological approaches including practice theory, political economic theory, evolutionary theory, and biocultural approaches. The contributing authors also attempt to identify the empirical data of violence, the social identity of victims, the motivations of perpetrators, and the ramifications of violence on the survivors (witnesses). *Part II. Small-Scale Conflict* (Ch 4-6) examines the physical, social, cultural, ideological and contextual evidence of community violence between individuals and between communities. *Part III. Warfare* (Ch 7-9) examines larger systems of violence and their ramifications in relation to settlement placement and planning, establishment of systems of violence, and the significance of the social identities of victims, perpetrators and witnesses. In this section, Tiffany Tung's chapter (Ch 9) on the treatment of local versus foreign women among the Wari

of highland Peru stands out. Tung examines the functions of the Wari warrior class, particularly their active roles in raiding and abducting individuals as a means of reaffirming ideological notions of power. Tung's theoretical framework involves the reconstruction of how a system of warfare affects people living under its influence. *Part IV. Ritualized Violence* (Ch 10-12) focuses on the means by which violence is ritualized. Understanding how violence becomes ritualized can provide insight into how forms of ritualized violence emerge and change. In this section, Kathryn M. Koziol's chapter (Ch 11) stands out, as it utilizes performance theory to help combat the challenges that come with interpreting variation in trauma within a single site, Cahokia. She compares the treatment of slaves and captives to exemplify how trauma patterns can be significantly different within the same society based on social, cultural, and ideological factors. Koziol emphasizes that violence is often an important part of cosmology and is often used in performative rituals that solidify social relationships.

This edited volume could have benefited from the inclusion of a more global perspective and from the inclusion of a wider range of socio-political complexity. Of the 12 contributing chapters, only the chapters by Harrod, Liénard, and Martin (Ch 3) and by Montgomery and Perry (Ch 4) focused on cultures outside of the Americas. Furthermore, the chapter by Haagen Klaus (Ch 2) was the only one concerning the post-Columbian period in the Americas. The remaining chapters primarily focused on the late pre-Columbian periods in the Americas. Even within the Americas, the cultural diversity presented in the volume is limited to Mississippian (Ch 7, 10, & 11), Southwest Puebloan (Ch 1, 5, & 6), Mayan (Ch 8 & 12), and Peruvian (Ch 2 & 9) groups. With the exception of the chapters pertaining to colonial-Spain (Ch 2), early Islamic Israel (Ch 4), and the Turkana (Ch 3), no other European, Asian, or African bioarchaeological material was presented. In addition to the limited geographical range, the case studies presented focused primarily on early horticulturalists and hunter-gathers. Under the section pertaining to warfare, it was disappointing not to have seen a chapter concerning state-level warfare. A chapter on research concerning the American Civil War era (de la Cova 2012), violence/warfare in Medieval Europe (Novak and Slaus 2012), or specific sites such as the Battle of the Little Bighorn (Spencer 2012; Willey and Scott 1996), Fort William Henry (Liston and Baker 1996), or the Battle of Townton (Sutherland 2007), could have greatly contributed to the book by providing a perspective on skeletal violence among state level populations as well as providing some historical perspectives on violence.

In sum, the contributors of the edited volume do not assume that violence is an innate characteristic of human behavior, nor is it presented as an aberration. Rather, violence is archaeologically contextualized to offer culturally specific examples of the complex social and historical situations leading to violence. The bioarchaeological approach and the focus on the corporeality of violence are positioned in such a way as to potentially extend anthropological discussions of violence in both archaeology and cultural anthropology. The quality of each contribution is unfortunately uneven. The strongest section is that relating to Methods and Theory. The strongest chapters are those that were able to engage social theories about interpersonal, ritualized, and structural violence as well as recognize the social identities intersecting attributes of ethnicity, gender, age, and community. In this regard the chapters by Tiffany Tung (Ch 9) and Kathryn Koziol (Ch 11) are exemplary. The remaining chapters are instructive examples of how trauma/violence can be identified in the past, but most remain comfortably situated within standard bioarchaeological reporting and fall short of the editors' larger aim of attacking the "Big" anthropological questions to gain insight into past human behaviors. The book is relevant for archaeologists interested in violent interactions in the Americas, those interested in how social theory can be used to expand bioarchaeological interpretations, and for those cultural anthropologists interested in gaining a better understanding of the study of violence in our present via the context of understanding something about violence in our past. The book would be appropriate for use in upper-level undergraduate coursework and above.

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